The County of Wellington, Solid Waste Services Division

Grasscycling Tips

What is grasscycling?

Grasscycling occurs when grass clippings are left on your lawn to decompose naturally. By leaving grass clippings on your lawn, nutrients are added back to the soil through the decomposition process.

Why grasscycle?

⇒ To divert grass waste from landfill sites.
⇒ To return nitrogen to the lawn and save money by not purchasing commercial fertilizers.
⇒ To save approximately 40% of the time normally spent mowing the lawn, by not raking, or bagging grass clippings.

Tips on grasscycling

- Cut your grass regularly and maintain the height of the lawn between 5 - 7 cm (2 - 3 inches). Grass that is cut too short can develop a burn-like appearance caused by factors such as underdeveloped root systems and soil moisture loss.
- Do not cut more than 1/3 off the grass blade at one time. Grass that is very long may require several cuttings to achieve the desirable height.
- Use any type of lawn mower with a sharp blade or add a mulching blade.
- Less frequent deep watering is more beneficial than frequent surface watering.

Composting grass clippings

- Fresh grass clippings are a nitrogen-rich “green” compostable material. Dried clippings are a carbon-rich “brown” material.
- Following standard composting methods, add layers of alternating “green” and “brown” materials, and top with garden soil or compost. Do not add more than a 6 cm (2.5 inch) layer at a time.
- Adding too much wet fresh grass (nitrogen-rich) to a composting bin can result in an ammonia-like odour to develop. The solution is to add more “brown” and less “green” materials.
- Do not add pernicious weeds (e.g., crabgrass) or weeds in seed to your composter.

Common Grasscycling Myths
True or False?

1. Grasscycling will cause thatch.	**False:** Thatch is caused by abnormally fast root and plant tissue growth caused by improper watering and fertilizing.
2. Grass clippings left on lawns look messy and ruin lawns.	**False:** Grass clippings decompose quickly when a lawn is mowed regularly and clippings are not left in clumps.
3. Grasscycling causes grass disease.	**False:** Factors involved with lawn disease include: improper watering and maintenance, unsuitable grass seed varieties, and poor soil conditions.

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(Adapted from the Composting Council of Canada and Environment Canada)

For information on putting your leaves to work ➔

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Putting Your Leaves To Work

Did you know? A forest naturally recycles nutrients (e.g., carbon, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus and magnesium). Through nutrient cycling, decomposer organisms will breakdown organic matter (e.g., leaves) and return the nutrients to the soil in a form that can be used by plants and microorganisms.

Why not let this process happen in your own yard?

As in the forest, fallen leaves in your yard will decompose naturally.
The process can be accelerated by running a lawnmower over the leaves.

Compost leaves!

- Green leaves are a nitrogen-rich “green” compostable material. Dried leaves are a carbon-rich “brown” material.
- Following standard composting methods, add layers of alternating “green” and “brown” materials, and top with garden soil or compost.
- Try the following to reduce the volume of leaves: shred in a garbage can with an electric lawn trimmer, run over with a lawnmower, or use a commercial chipper/ shredder.
- In the fall, store surplus dry leaves in a bag or container. Dried leaves are an excellent “brown” material to add to the composter in the spring.

Use your leaves as a mulch

Mulch is a layer of decomposing material that covers the soil surface. You can use your leaves as a mulch on your vegetable garden or flower beds.

Fall & Winter: In the fall, insulate your garden with mulch to help prevent frost from damaging sensitive perennials in your flower beds. Apply at least six inches of leaves for best results, or dig your leaves into your vegetable garden. Leaves are an excellent conditioner for your garden.

Spring & Summer: In the fall, store dry leaves in a bag or storage area. These leaves can be used as a spring and summer mulch the following year. The benefits will include conservation of soil moisture, shading of plant roots and erosion control. The leaves will also return nutrients to the soil.

Know your leaves

There are some leaves that should be treated with caution when used in a composter or as a mulch. Leaves from most members of the Walnut family (e.g., black walnut and butternut) produce a chemical called juglone. There are plants that are tolerant of juglone, however, some susceptible plants may have a toxic reaction upon exposure. These leaves can be added to your composter—but it may take up to a year before the juglone breaks down and the finished compost can be used safely on gardens and house plants.

(Adapted from materials produced by the Seattle Tilth Association Waste Utility and the Recycling Council of Ontario.)

Questions? Visit SWS at www.county.wellington.on.ca

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Working together to reduce waste in Wellington County!